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Ben Barka Kidnap: A French 'Warren Report'

By DON COOK

World Journal Tribune Special

PARIS, Oct. 15—The Ben Barka kidnaping trial has reached the stage of summing up, and a verdict of the six defendants is expected within a week. But like the Warren commission report on the Kennedy assassination, the outcome will never be fully accepted by the French public as full justice or the full truth.

For five weeks, a procession of 200 witnesses—evasive, contradictory, sometimes sinister, occasionally hysterical passed through the Palais de Justice to accuse, counter-accuse, dodge, blame, alibi, plead and argue.

"Vulgar subalterns," president Charles de Gaulle labeled those charged with the Ben Barka kidnaping months before the trial opened. If the trial has not convinced the French public that these six defendants, and these alone, were responsible for the affair, it has at least proved that they are indeed "vulgar subalterns."

Nor has anything very startling or surprising emerged from the testimony to change the known outlines of the case. One year ago, in October, 1965, Mehdi Ben Barka, a young, somewhat idealistic Moroccan opposition leader in exile, was kidnaped on the streets of Paris in daylight, with the complicity of agents of the French secret police, and has never been seen or heard of since. The presumption is that he was murdered.

WHO ORDERED IT?

The complicity of the defendants in the affair has been either admitted or established in the testimony—but that is not the real central issue. Who ordered the Ben Barka kidnaping? Who organized it? Did the "vulgar subalterns" act in the belief that they were "covered," or protected, by higher authorities of the French police, even ministers of the government or the government itself? These are the questions which remain unanswered.

The six accused are:

Marcel Leroy-Finville, head of one of the counter-espionage French secret services, who is

charged with failure to inform his superiors of the kidnaping despite immediate, if not prior, knowledge that it was taking place.

Antoine Lopez, an employee of Air France at Orly airport, who once worked in the French police in Morocco and continued to act as a secret agent. He took part in the actual kidnaping of Ben Barka.

Louis Souchon and Roger Voitet, two officers in the narcotics branch of the French police who were also involved in the kidnaping operation.

Philippe Bernier, a journalist, who is accused of "fingering" Ben Barka and arranging the meeting at which the kidnaping took place.

El Ghali el Mahi, a Moroccan police official, who is the closest the French have come to putting in the dock the people who they contend were the real culprits and organizers — the Moroccan secret services.

MOROCCAN MINISTER

In particular, the name of the Moroccan minister of the interior, Gen. Muhammad Oufkir, recurs constantly. Oufkir is also under indictment by the French court, and France has demanded that king Hassan dismiss him from his post and deliver him to Paris to stand trial. Not surprisingly, this has been refused. The contention is that Oufkir enlisted the help of the French police officers in organizing the kidnaping in order to eliminate Ben Barka, who was planning to return to Morocco and make a political deal with the king to resume an active role in his country once again.

Lopez, Souchon and Voitet testified that they then carried out the kidnaping, believing they had the authorization of higher officials in the ministry of the interior through various telephone calls and messages. Leroy-Finville, their nominal superior, told the court:

"I am living through a nightmare. I am locked in this secret of national defense. They say I will keep quiet. But I must establish my innocence. You will be edified. I must leave this court merely to



MEHDI BEN BARKA
Abducted from Paris' Latin Quarter

climb into a Black Maria to be taken before the state security tribunal, I demand the protection of the court."

But by the time the testimony was completed, the court was still not edified and still did not know all. Is it a cover-up for higher officials for which Leroy-Finville, Lopez, Souchon and the rest will go to jail rather than risk worse if they tell all? Nobody knows, but the suspicion to the plot-minded French is irresistible.

SORDID AFFAIR

The trial has been peppered with names and accusations of involvement — including minister of the interior Roger Frey and premier Georges Pompidou. Both sent laconic written answers to the court to such questions as "when were you first informed of the kidnaping? Other witnesses to testify from the government, equally unenlightening, were the French ambassador to Morocco and two officials from the foreign ministry dealing with north African affairs.

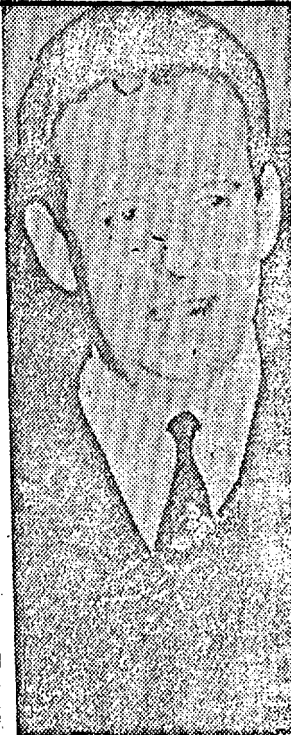
It is clear that Gen. Oufkir arrived mysteriously in Paris

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Associated Press Photo
PIERRE LEMARCHAND
A witness in the case



ANTOINE LOPEZ AFTER QUESTIONING
Arrested in connection with kidnaping

the day after the kidnaping, stayed in France two days, and then returned to Morocco. Newspaper and magazine articles, as well as testimony at the trial, have contended that Oufkir joined Ben Barka and his kidnapers in a hide-away outside of Paris, and

that Ben Barka was never seen alive again.

But if this murky and sordid affair were not confused enough, the man who has linked Oufkir to the kidnaping and murder is dead. He was a small-time gangster named George Figon who

wandered around for weeks after the kidnaping, interviewing journalists in secret about his role in the case, until he died an apparent suicide just as police burst into his apartment to arrest him.

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